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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: A UNIFIED CONTACT GROUP PRESSES STANDARDS,
FLEXIBILITY

Sensitive but unclassified; please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Representatives of the Contact Group (CG) visited Kosovo April 6-7 to highlight CG unity and deliver a focused message about the importance of the standards and elements of an eventual future status settlement; by prior agreement, the CG did not address the status outcome itself. CG representatives met in Mitrovica with the mayors of the three northern municipalities, who said that Kosovo's Serbs are not interested in building or participating in Kosovo government institutions that emerge after status is determined. In Pristina, SRSG Soren Jessen-Petersen gave an upbeat assessment of Kosovo's new government and COMKFOR. Guiseppe Valotto asserted that KFOR was more capable now to respond to civil unrest than it had been in the past. The Kosovo Albanian status negotiating team pledged to the CG to focus on the standards and take other measures to build confidence with Kosovo's minorities; opposition leader Hashim Thaci used the meeting to blast the "institutionalized corruption" of the current government. In response, CG representatives asked Kosovo Albanian leaders to be flexible and generous in the Kosovo status negotiations and to reinvigorate work on the standards. President Fatmir Sejdiu and Prime Minister Agim Ceku, both newcomers, impressed the CG with their seriousness. Moderate Kosovo Serbs spoke critically of Belgrade, asked for CG support for them to rejoin Kosovo institutions and pressed for constitutionally-based rights guarantees. Non-Serb minorities (Roma, Turk, Bosniak), deeply appreciative of the CG's attention, offered support for decentralization, provided it addresses their communities' specific needs. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Representatives of the Contact Group (CG) visited Kosovo April 6-7, 2006 after meetings earlier in the week in Athens and Belgrade. DAS Rosemary DiCarlo and Kosovo desk officer Joshua Black represented the United States; also attending were Johannes Haindl (Germany), Gerard McGurk (United Kingdom), Raimondo De Cardona (Italy), Jean-Francois Terral (France), Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko (Russia), Hannes Porias (Austria/EU Presidency) and Alexandros Giannis (EU).

In order to highlight CG unity, the CG agreed in advance to not discuss the status outcome, but rather to highlight the elements of an eventual settlement, the importance of standards implementation and the need to engage constructively in the ongoing status negotiations.

Northern Mayors Want No Part in an Independent Kosovo

13. (SBU) On April 6 CG representatives met in north Mitrovica with the hard-line mayors of Zvecan, Zubin Potok and Leposavic and the Mitrovica head of the Serbian government Coordination Center for Kosovo (CCK). All mayors said they refused to accept the idea that the protection of Kosovo Serbs is a CG priority. They also rejected any sort of participation in Kosovo government institutions unless there were a veto mechanism to protect minority interests. The three mayors urged the CG not to rush the status process and stated that conditions do not yet exist for internally-displaced persons in Kosovo to return to their homes. Leposavic mayor Velimir Bojovic referred to Kosovo's ethnic Albanians as "terrorists" and warned the CG against rewarding them with their own state. DAS DiCarlo asserted decentralization can protect Serbs and facilitate transparently-funded assistance from Belgrade. She repeated the CG position that there can be no partition of Kosovo. The French representative said that the idea of a separate Serb "entity" does not fit the Kosovo reality, especially for Kosovo Serbs in enclaves south of the Ibar. He argued that the creation of new municipalities and decentralization would achieve the same ends, but without the de facto division of Kosovo.

14. (SBU) CG representatives criticized a recent CCK directive forcing Kosovo Serbs to choose between their Belgrade and

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Pristina salaries. CG representatives contended the CCK ultimatum reinforces parallel structures and undermines the creation of a multi-ethnic entity. DiCarlo said the CG strongly opposes the directive that teachers choose between Pristina and Belgrade salaries as disadvantaging an already disadvantaged population. The mayors said the additional salaries from Kosovo's Consolidated Budget were paltry when compared to those paid by Belgrade and criticized Pristina for not providing benefits such as pensions and social security.

15. (SBU) After the meeting, the CG issued a short press statement that called for greater cooperation on both sides of the Ibar River to solve the problems of the Mitrovica region. The statement also reaffirmed the CG's opposition to the partition of Kosovo, de facto or otherwise.

UNMIK Asks CG for Help on Standards Implementation

16. (SBU) SRSG Soren Jessen-Petersen presented an upbeat picture of the new Kosovo government in his meeting with the CG April 7 in Pristina. Jessen-Petersen said he has been very pleased with new Prime Minister Agim Ceku, particularly his statements on multi-ethnicity, and his attempt to re-energize the government. He asked the CG to send Kosovo leaders a clear message: "we know what you want as the outcome of final status talks, but now you must earn it." On the standards, he asked the CG to push for progress on rule of law, freedom of movement, returns and church reconstruction. He asked that CG liaison offices in Pristina support the standards working groups.

17. (SBU) COMKFOR Lt. General Guiseppe Valotto reported that KFOR troop strength is down substantially from the 41,000 immediately after the end of the conflict in 1999, and KFOR is better capable of responding to threats than it was during the March 2004 riots. He noted the lesson learned from the March riots was that KFOR needed to provide riot control. He

said he hoped KFOR would complete its transformation from a brigade to a task force structure before his own planned departure in early September 2006.

Giving the Kosovo Unity Team Advice on Next Steps

¶8. (SBU) Meeting with President Fatmir Sejdiu, DiCarlo asked for more outreach and public statements encouraging tolerance, as well as flexibility and compromise in the status negotiations. Other CG representatives told Sejdiu that Kosovo Albanians must show a commitment to multi-ethnicity and pressed for more progress and tangible results on return of property, investigation of inter-ethnic crimes and development of the rule of law. Sejdiu agreed that the return of Kosovo Serbs is a key standard that needs more work and added that Kosovo Albanians need to make Serbs feel more at home and encourage them to stay.

¶9. (SBU) The Kosovo Albanian final status negotiating team (the "Unity Team") gave themselves high marks for recent developments in Vienna and Pristina. Opposition leader Veton Surroi touted achievements of the minority consultative process he chairs, including the inclusion of non-Serb minorities on all Kosovo delegations to the Vienna talks, the imminent designation of the Roma language as one of Kosovo's official languages (a first in Europe, he claimed), and the holding of an informal dialogue over several days in Durres, Albania with Kosovo Serb leaders from the Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija (SLKM). He noted that he had briefed SLKM members in Durres on what had happened at the Vienna meetings, something he said Belgrade had failed to do, and he urged the CG to encourage SLKM to keep open this communication channel.

¶10. (SBU) Unity Team coordinator Blerim Shala said team members were working intensively to get ready for what they

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hoped would be an accelerated pace of meetings facilitated by Special Envoy Ahtisaari. While noting the team's red lines on decentralization (no third layer of government, no partition of Kosovo), he said there was plenty of room for generous proposals on Mitrovica, preservation of cultural heritage, and other matters.

¶11. (SBU) Speaking on behalf of the CG, DiCarlo enumerated some of the CG's own status priorities: a negotiated settlement in 2006; a multi-ethnic Kosovo acceptable to the Kosovo people; no new layer of government; facilitation of inter-municipal cooperation; transparent assistance from Belgrade for Kosovo Serb communities; and creation of new municipalities. DiCarlo urged the Unity Team to draft a new proposal on the preservation of cultural and religious heritage and make more public statements on tolerance, multi-ethnicity, compromise and the standards. DiCarlo emphasized that Kosovo negotiators must not take a nothing-is-agreed-until-everything-is-agreed position, as they did in Vienna. She also listed a series of specific actions on the standards that she said could help build confidence and a better climate for the negotiations: a zero tolerance initiative on inter-ethnic crime; aggressively removing ethnic graffiti; adjudicating property rights and implementing a rental scheme for people who live in homes owned by displaced persons; passing stalled minority rights legislation; and accelerating the restoration of Serbian Orthodox churches damaged in the March 2004 riots.

¶12. (SBU) President Sejdiu said that his outreach efforts are coordinated with the SRSG and guided by a simple formula -- property, practical rights, and the right to return to one's own home. He called for the Vienna process to begin to focus on Mitrovica, economic development, and missing persons. PM Agim Ceku said he is well aware of the importance of the SRSG's next report to the United Nations Security Council. He announced that an internationally known Serb minority

representative would lead a task force in the PM's office to draft an action plan on "how we will work with minorities." Referring to the CG's specific confidence-building suggestions, Ceku said he agreed with a zero-tolerance approach to inter-ethnic crime and pledged that the newly established Ministry of Internal Affairs would work closely with UNMIK Police and the Kosovo Police Service to implement this approach and report more regularly on police interventions. He said the Assembly would hold a special session on the standards and would expedite consideration of legislation on language policy and other minority rights issues. Ceku reported that a new agency director would be appointed to focus on corruption and that the newly created Kosovo Property Agency would now have jurisdiction over outstanding property claims. He said a new working group on missing persons would be headed by the president of the Center for Human Rights and Freedoms, a respected Kosovar NGO.

¶13. (SBU) The Italian representative warned that the Kosovo delegation's performance in the third Vienna meeting was "not as smooth" as in the first two and urged a rededication to making progress on as many details as possible. He suggested that the constraints under which the Belgrade delegation was laboring presented an opportunity for the Pristina delegation to send a high-minded message to the Kosovo Serb minority. The French representative pushed the Unity Team to be forthcoming on proposals for inter-municipal cooperation, including trans-border cooperation.

¶14. In a brief follow-on session with Ceku, DiCarlo informed him that the CG had pressed Belgrade to endorse Kosovo Serb participation in the PISG and had harshly criticized the CCK's salary initiative. The German representative urged Ceku to do more to move Kosovo decentralization forward and, referring to the CG's meeting with northern Kosovo mayors, urged Ceku to cultivate the mayors as apparent "people of good will." Ceku replied that "we are implementing what can be implemented" on decentralization, referring in particular to the opening of seven police substations in Kosovo Serb

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areas with another seven planned.

SLKM Wants Explicit CG Support to Return to PISG Institutions

¶15. (SBU) In its meeting with SLKM representatives Oliver Ivanovic, Randjel Nojkic and Goran Bogdanovic, the CG stressed that Kosovo Serbs must participate in Kosovo institutions in order to get the guarantees they need to live here. SLKM representatives agreed, but asked the CG to support their participation and help guarantee they would not be mere "decoration" to prove that the Kosovo government was inclusive. Ivanovic complained bitterly about the CCK directive on Kosovo Serb salaries, which he called "catastrophic." He asked that minority rights be specifically enshrined in Kosovo's constitution instead of through legislation. The French representative told the group that decentralization -- with the opportunity for real inter-municipal cooperation -- is the best way to give local self-government. In response, the Kosovo Serbs offered differing views on the prospects for decentralization in Kosovo. Ivanovic asserted that ethnic Serbs needed several new Kosovo Serb-majority, but not mono-ethnic, municipalities of significant size and functionality so as to be sustainable. Bogdanovic said the establishment of new municipalities would create conditions for returns. Nojkic opined that imposed decentralization will not last, and it is therefore important that Kosovo Serbs participate in negotiations on this topic. He added that Belgrade's proposal for vertical ties with Serb municipalities could only be accomplished if it was done in accordance with Kosovo law.

Non-Serb Minorities Want to be Heard

¶16. (SBU) The CG also met with representatives of Kosovo's non-Serb minority communities: Kosovo Health Minister Sadrik Idrizi (Bosniak), Kosovo Assembly presidency member Mahir Yagcilar (Turkish), caucus leader Dzezair Murati (Bosniak) and Kosovo Assembly member Haxhi Zylfi Mergja (Roma). These representatives asserted that Kosovo's non-Serb minorities do not want to be left out of status discussions and were therefore appreciative the CG agreed to meet with them. They praised U.S. Office Pristina for its intense, long-term interest in non-Serb minorities and chided the other CG liaison offices for their perceived indifference. While they pledged support for decentralization in general, they asked for clear criteria for creating new municipalities. They noted that except for the pilot project municipality in the mono-ethnic Turkish town of Mamusha, most of Kosovo's non-Serb minorities live in multi-ethnic communities. They said they share the view of the Serb minority that minority rights should be included in Kosovo's eventual constitution.

¶17. (U) DAS DiCarlo cleared on this message. Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG